

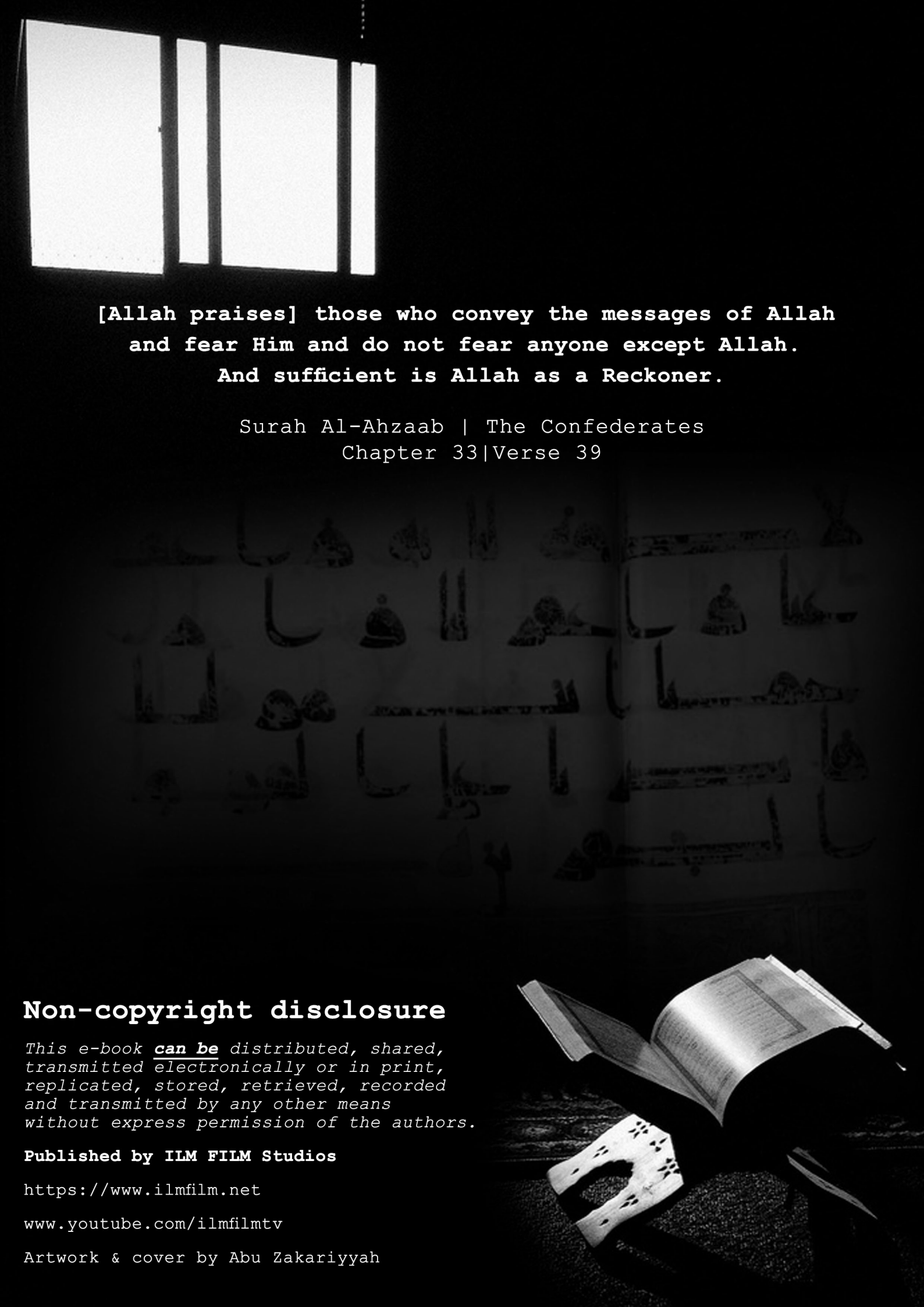


GREAT MUSLIM LIVES

VOLUME VI



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[Allah praises] those who convey the messages of Allah
and fear Him and do not fear anyone except Allah.
And sufficient is Allah as a Reckoner.

Surah Al-Ahzaab | The Confederates
Chapter 33|Verse 39

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Foreword

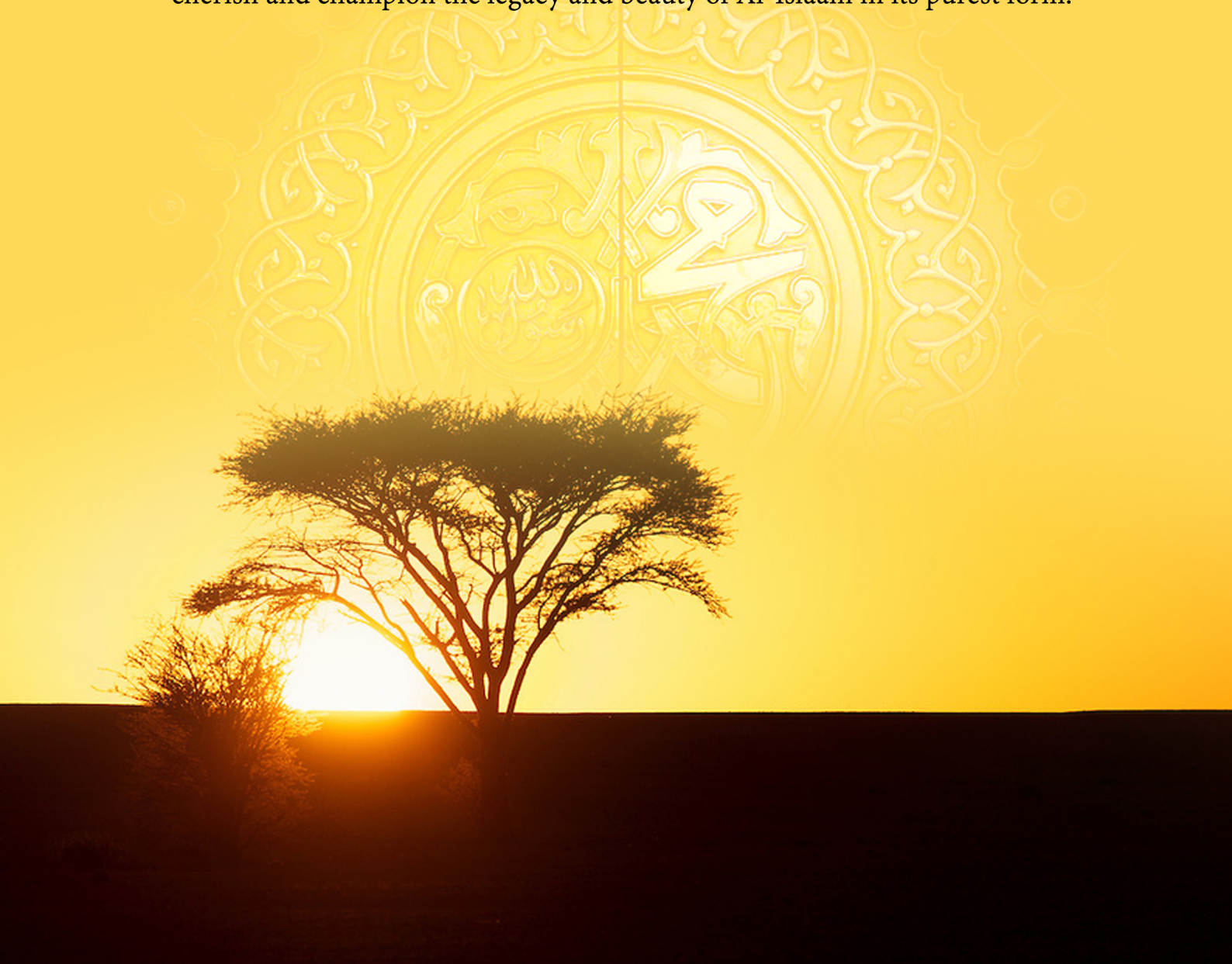
May the Peace and Salutations of Allah be upon our beloved Muhammad (صلى الله عليه و سلم)
The Trustworthy, The Final Prophet and Messenger of Allah.

“Until the lion learns to speak, the tales of the hunter will be told”

They remind us of our defeat, our degradation and our deviation from the pathways of progress, piety and prosperity. In such times it may be difficult to draw inspiration and find courage in our identity as contemporary Muslims, however history reminds us that Islam has always been strengthened and supported by men and women of integrity, virtue and of exemplary accomplishments.

It is with a heart full of optimism, hope and love for Al-Islaam that we present to the reader a rich catalogue of contemporary biographies, each one recounting the life and legacy of a great Muslim personality.

Collectively, all of our subjects have demonstrated outstanding will and determination to cherish and champion the legacy and beauty of Al-Islaam in its purest form.



BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI (1877 - 1960)

LETTERS OF LIGHT

TEARFUL SUNSET

Turkey, the seat of the Ottoman Empire for nearly six hundred golden years. Yet during her final days towards the turn of the twentieth century, the once gallant and sovereign spirit of the Islamic Caliphate was slowly being crushed beneath the overwhelming weight of Europe's military and political apparatus. But even in her dying days, the indomitable spirit of Turkey's national pride was able to give birth to one of its final and perhaps finest wonders.

A PIOUS HOUSEHOLD

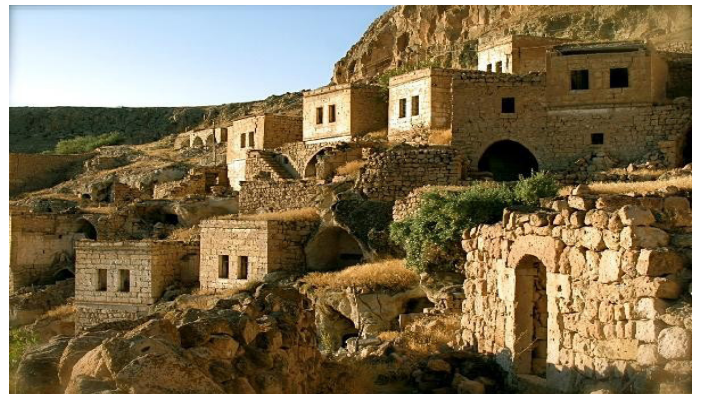
Born in the year 1877, Said Ibn Hajji Mirza was born in a modest yet pious household. His parents were of Kurdish ethnicity and had taken residence in the small village of Nurs, situated within the South eastern province of Bitlis Vilayet, in what was then known as Anatolia. His father, Hajji Mirza, was very observant and strict in his religious commitment, he took special care to ensure that his family only consumed lawful food. As for his mother, Nuriya – she was committed to observing habitual prayers throughout the night. She also insisted on performing ritual ablutions before breastfeeding any of her children.

THE CHILD PRODIGY

It was not long after the birth of the young Said that his exceptional aptitude for learning and his vast ability to retain and recall information was noticed by instructors at school and by local scholars in the religious establishment.

In fact, by the age of 14, the young prodigy had completed the entire catalogue of studies at the local seminary for which he was fittingly awarded a diploma.

His genius did not go unremarked and he was soon given the title of *Badi'u Zaman* an Arabic term that can be translated as "The Wonder of the Age". His unsurpassed ability to deconstruct complex arguments and present compelling logical deductions and reasoning to his favor - was widely attested to and admired by members of the highest intellectual circles of the day.



However, like many great thinkers and intellectual persons throughout history, the young prodigy soon outgrew his subjects and found several causes of concern with the teaching styles and subjects being regurgitated in the schools and religious institutions of the day.

He soon became a vocal advocate for a more complete syllabus and mode of study. Unlike many of his traditional contemporaries, Said Nursi had mastered many of the physical sciences and subjects and even studied philosophy at length in order to counter and rebuke the anti-religious arguments that were fast gaining ground in the new world.

His efforts were centered around the establishment of a university for which he had been granted the audience of Sultan Abdul Hameed in 1907 and by 1913 he had been granted the funds and the permission to build the foundations of what was to be known as the *Medrassatul Zahra*, however due to ensuing unrest and wars, the project never came to full fruition.



GLADSTONE'S CHALLENGE

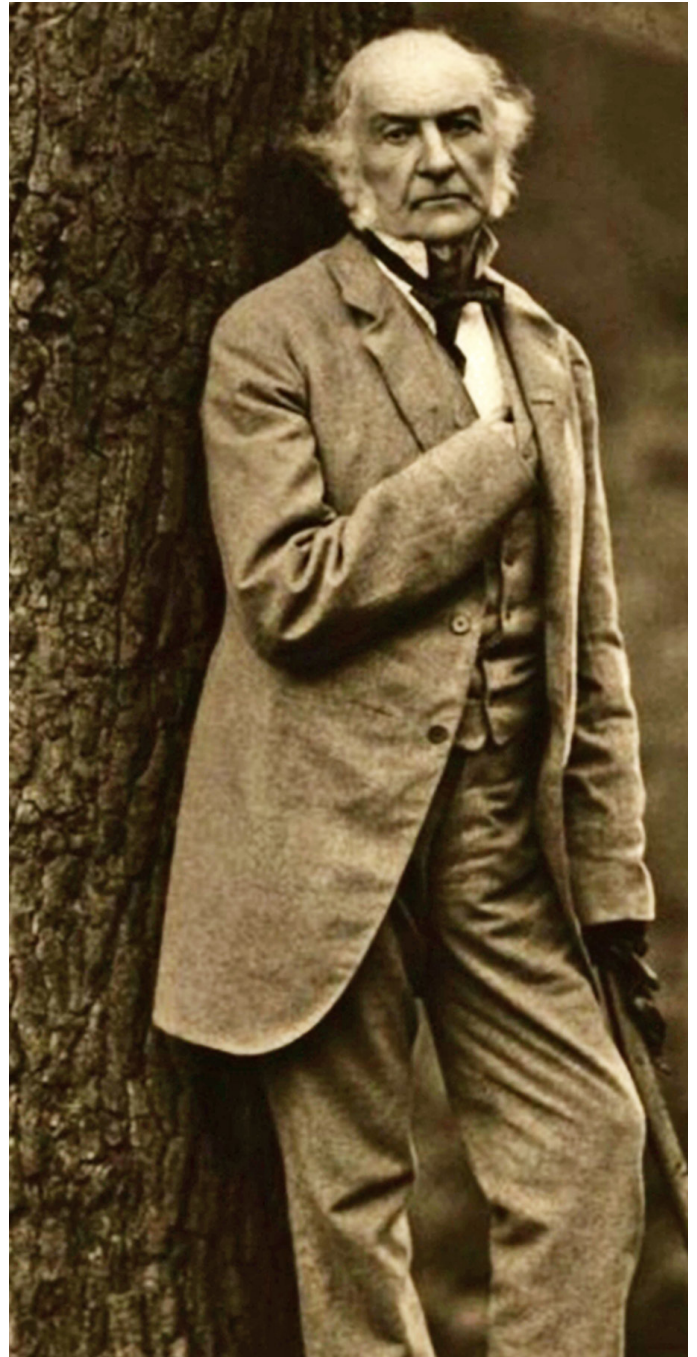
At the heart of Turkey's eventual deconstruction was the near-total annihilation of Islamic code and conduct in the everyday lives and environment of the Turkish people. At the order of Mustafa Kamal Attaturk, women were forbidden to wear the Hijab in public, the call to prayers were no longer permitted in the Arabic language, the educational syllabus was overridden and Latin numerals and letters were now the official means of communication – in fact, Islam was all but abolished in Turkey under Mustafa Kamal's rule.

It was in this dark hour and in the deepest depths of humiliation and degradation of a once great Ottoman Empire - that the then Prime Minister of Great Britain, William Gladstone, a four times elected leader, decided to stand up in the full course of parliamentary processions with a copy of the Noble Quran in hand, boldly declaring that;

“So long as this accursed book remains in existence, there could be no hope for peace in the world”.

Perhaps Mustafa Kamal was able to efface the external symbols of Islam but Gladstone was determined to extinguish the very essence and core of the religion, forever. As these words were transmitted across the globe and reverberated in the inner most sanctum of the collective Muslim heart and mind – Badi'u Zaman Said Nursi took Gladstone's challenge and uttered the famous proclamation that would define his life's work from that very day onwards.

“I shall prove and demonstrate to the world that the Quran is an undying, inexhaustible Sun”



THE HORSE-BACK SCHOLAR

Said Nursi lived during the Turkish nation's most turbulent times, having experienced World War I and participated in battles against the occupying Russian troops who had invaded his village and place of birth. Along with three thousand warriors, Said Nursi fought valiantly to defend the honour and safety of his village, however the fight was lost and he was subsequently imprisoned by the Czar for two years.

It was while in the custody of the Russians that Said Nursi incited the fury of the Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich of Russia, who had visited the garrison of Kostroma where he met the prisoners of war, all of whom stood up immediately as a sign of respect and deference – with the exception of Said Nursi, who remained calm and seated. The Grand Duke took offense to this blatant act of disrespect and ordered for the Sheikh to be executed before a firing squad. His fellow captives, some of whom were Europeans, begged and pleaded with the Sheikh to make an apology in an attempt to spare his life, but he rejected this offer. Finally, when he was brought before the marksmen and lined up for what was to mark his imminent death, Said Nursi made a last request to observe a final prayer, this he was granted and he began to perform his act of devotion in plain sight of the Duke. When he raised his head and completed the prayer the Duke had an immediate change of heart and ordered the soldiers to suspend the execution – he realized that it was not a direct insult to him but a deep attachment and respect for Islam that had resulted in Said Nursi's apparent act of defiance.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS

In 1918, Badi'u Zaman Said Nursi escaped from the Russian camp and returned to Istanbul via Warsaw, Berlin, and Vienna. He was welcomed home and soon elected to participate in the newly formed *Dar-al Hikmat al-Islamiye council*. It was during this phase of his life that he met Syed Ali Akbar Shah, the Deputy Education Minister of Pakistan who was visiting Istanbul. Said Nursi subsequently received generous offers for support towards publicizing his message and an invitation to live in Pakistan, however Said Nursi graciously turned down the offer in favor of continuing the struggle to revive Islam in Turkey. When Syed Ali Akbar Shah returned to Pakistan he continued to maintain close ties with Said Nursi and even published and promoted his works in a newspaper called *Al-Jumhuriyyah*.

Following his outstanding contribution in the struggle for independence from the European allied forces - Badi'u Zaman Said Nursi was invited to Ankara by Mustafa Kamal Atatürk in recognition of his work. However upon his arrival in Ankara, Said Nursi was horrified to discover the growing influence of atheism and secularism in the intellectual and affluent ranks of high society, in fact he rebuked Mustafa Kamal Attaturk publicly and directly, for having instructed his officers to abandon the performance of prayers. Thereafter in a political and strategic attempt to neutralize and incentivize the Sheikh to join forces with the establishment, Mustafa Kamal Attaturk offered Said Nursi the position of leadership at the *Ministry of Religious Affairs* along with property, money and status – all of which were rejected one after the other.

THE LEVANTINE LECTURE

Following his open and frank disavowal of the Kamalist policy in Turkey, Said Nursi soon became an enemy of the state and the long stretch of persecution and routine exile commenced. Yet despite the heavy burden of responsibility on his shoulders and the eminent dangers he faced by the opposition, Badi'u Zaman remained steadfast and firm upon his Faith. In 1911 he visited Damascus and delivered a powerful and eloquent lecture in Syria's Grand Ummayyad mosque before a congregation of ten thousand faithful, including one hundred senior scholars. He spoke at length detailing the prescribed cures for the renewal of Faith and revival of Islam once more.

LETTERS OF LIGHT

It was during his loneliest days in exile that Said Nursi experienced a transformation in thinking and had an epiphany – prompting him to later write about the '*Old Said Nursi*' in direct contrast with the '*New Said Nursi*'. In a dream he saw one night, his mother – who had died while he was only a child – appeared standing near the mountains of Araraat, the mountain then began to shake and his mother showed signs of anxiety and worry, to which her son responded by reassuring her that Allah is Wise and Merciful. He then heard his name being called from inside the mountain, beckoning him to proclaim and announce the miracles of the Quran.

During his twenty five year exile and repeated imprisonment, punishment and humiliation – Said Nursi grew in his spiritual strength and wrote around one hundred and thirty books on the topic of the Quran's Miraculous nature, the proofs for the existence of God, the pillars of Islam and many other profound insights – this would be the foundation of his famous collection of essays and manuscripts later to be known as the *Risale-I-Noor* (*Treaties of Light*). His disciples made handwritten copies of his manuscripts and circulated as many as six hundred thousand copies of his works, helping restore and revive the faith of millions of Muslims who were fast becoming lost in the rising tide of atheism, by the 1960s Said Nursi's supporters were close to a million members.

A LEGACY OF LIGHT

Towards the latter part of his life, Said Nursi concluded that the Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him) were prime sources of guidance and the most complete code of conduct for spiritual and material success. He moved away from his earlier focus on scientific and philosophical proofs in favour of strict adherence to the sacred text and to the prophetic tradition.



THE LAST MILE

His life was plagued with sequential trials and tortures at the hand of his political opponents, right up to the hour in which he died, having breathed his last breath on the 27th night of Ramadan in the year 1960. Badi'u Zaman's earthly journey ended while he was travelling to Urfa. He died of exhaustion and health complications that were developed while he was kept in captivity and solitude for a number of years.

Yet even in death, his body was not allowed to be buried in the town in which he died, for to his adversaries he was still dangerous and worthy of exile, yet several decades after his death the *Risale-I-Noor* continues to shine forth as a testament of his brilliance and profound understanding of the Quran and his deep love of the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and blessings be upon him).

May he find his journey's rest in the high mansions of Paradise among the noble Angel scribes, Witnesses and Prophets.

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PAL

NAWAB SIKANDAR BEGUM (1818 - 1868)

THE PRINCESS AND THE KAABAH

JOURNEY'S BEGINNING

Hajj, the journey of a lifetime that often presents the voyager with the most magnificent and profound life experiences as they traverse through the wide expanse of the desert orchestra, beneath the heavenly lanterns hanging above the open theatre of desert dunes and mountainous waves peppered along the pathway to the *Ancient House*.

Just as Hagar wandered in a bewildered state between mounts *Safa and Marwa* in search of nourishment for her infant child, this journey is as much that of women as it is that of the great men whose names continue to grace the pages of history, but at the heart of this journey lies the ornamental gift of feminine sacrifice, motherly determination, female heroism and human resilience.

WHEELS IN MOTION

Travelling with a thousand servants, advisors and subjects towards the holy city of Makkah. Accompanied by her trusted and learned advisor Molvi Abdul Qayyum, who would serve as her religious guide and advisor throughout the journey - they departed from Bombay and embarked towards Jeddah, in the Hijaz, now known as Saudi Arabia.

The seafaring voyage was concluded in the 14th of Sha'ban (January the 24rd 1864). This was indeed a long way from the royal realm of Bhopal – and as if becoming a stranger in a foreign land, Princess Sikandar was now like all other pilgrims, a welcomed guest journeying towards the *House of God*.

ROYAL APPOINTMENT

Having inherited royal duties in the year 1819, at the most tender age of 15 months under the regency of her mother, a strong and assertive matriarch of royal lineage and decent. Sikandar grew up to become ruler of the princely state of Bhopal in central India, first as regent between 1844 and 1860 and then as a fully-fledged ruler between the years 1860 to 1868.

Princess Sikandar - who was of Afghan decent, was a strong-minded and shrewd ruler, like her mother. Lady Sikandar was also exceptional in that she had rejected the traditional custom of perpetual seclusion – favouring instead, a more active and engaging role in the midst of her subjects, while serving in the seat of power.

A ROYAL DEPARTURE

On the morning of her royal departure, Princess Sikandar Begum was preparing herself spiritually and physically for the journey ahead - by performing ritual ablution, offering two units of voluntary prayer and reciting verses from the Noble Quran before departing from the luxurious settings of her very own palace, the *Moti Mahal*.

As the chariots were being prepared for the adventurous journey ahead, the noble princess made her way to her father's final resting place in a bid to send her salutations upon his soul, almost bidding him farewell as she made ready for the pilgrimage to Makkah. Finally, she uttered the testimony of faith, praying that her journey may be safe and that the subsequent reward shall in-part be shared with her predecessors.



PERILS ON THE PATH

Sikandar's journey through the sacred land was filled with eventful occurrences and memorable experiences, notwithstanding the prevalent dangers with which many pilgrims grew accustomed to as they journeyed through the wild and rugged tracts of the desert. These often included extortionate demands for bribes, provisions and money from nomadic tribal chiefs at nearly every check-point. On one occasion the Princess was even the subject of a planned kidnapping plot.

Many beautiful memories were also chronicled in her notes, from the handsome and well-bred Arabian horses to the luxurious sweets of Jeddah and the enchanting moon of Al-Madinah. Sikandar poetically describes the pebbles on the high hills of Makkah - as coming in all colours, somewhat similar to the multitude of shades around the Kaabah itself, she talks of the grand Arabian windmills and the delicious fruits of the city.

On her momentous grand pilgrimage to the *House of God*, this south eastern Princess not only spread light on many of the prevalent ills of the day, but she also instilled a great sense of responsibility and urgency upon the incumbents in Makkah and Madinah, pressing for them to live up to the high and noble standards of conduct prescribed in the Glorious Quran. Her concern and desire to improve the prevalent conditions there is replete in her narrative.

For example, the apparent lack of organisation and sanitary measures in the cities urged the princess to express her heart's desire to be granted charge of Makkah and Madinah along with the Ottoman Sultan's £300,000 annual grant for the maintenance of the sacred precincts – she continues to describe how she would set things in order in just a couple of days.

An educated woman, Princess Sikandar also expressed her desire to have the Noble Quran translated into Turkish so that the ordinary men and women - ignorant of the beautiful teachings of the Quran would be able to understand their religion better, but when her proposal was rejected by the Pasha of Makkah, Sikandar ordered for the translation to go ahead regardless of any objections.



A MEMORABLE PILGRIMAGE

Though her stay in the holy land has enlightened many audiences in the West and paved the way for subsequent Princesses and Queens coming from the Asian sub-continent, we are at loss in not being able to recount and chronicle all of her wonderful and awe inspiring adventures and encounters during the course of her travels in the blessed land – at the end of which Sikandar returned to her native home with much to share with her loyal subjects and a lot more to preserve in the documented accounts of her pilgrimage.



GOING BACK HOME

This powerful matriarch was renowned for her vibrant and charismatic demeanour. She was known to have galloped on horseback, participating in polo matches and often accompanying hardened warriors when they embarked on a journey to hunt ferocious tigers in the wild, and least of all - Sikandar Begum was an expert swordswoman.

Her rule extended to the armed forces as she was the acting commander in chief who singlehandedly organized and arranged her soldiers to protect nearly six hundred principalities, encompassing one third of the Indian population under the British Indian Empire of the day.

Yet despite her astonishing repertoire of skills and prowess, the woman was devout and observant in her faith. In fact, it was her intellectual genius and adventurous spirit that ultimately drove her to make this once in a lifetime journey, of which she took meticulous notes and conveyed to us so eloquently and poetically as if leaving crib-notes for the countless Muslim women to come after her, each one a *princess* in her own right.





GREAT MUSLIM LIVES



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ALMAMI SAMORI TOURE (1830 - 1900)

BLACK NAPOLEON

THE AFRICAN EMPEROR

One of the great Kings, Empire builders, Generals, Warriors and Liberators in African history. Almami Samori Touré was commonly known to the French Army as the *Black Napoleon of the Sudan*, but who was this remarkable man and what is his story.

TRIBAL DISPUTES

Almami Samori Lafiya Touré was born in the year 1830 in a village southeast of Kankan, in present-day Guinea. Yet who would have predicted that in 1830 a great leader would arise and be born of an ordinary household from among the other ordinary households in this remote village.

History often repeats herself, but not in vain. For how often have legendary souls been enshrouded in the garment of anonymity, hidden beneath the veranda of ordinary life unaware of their own importance while the hands of time and circumstance carefully conspire to unveil the remarkable sequence of events that would ultimately unravel the greatness that is so often concealed within the unsuspecting hearts of such men and women.



THE RANSOM

Samori Touré's childhood was not unlike that of many others in nineteenth century Guinea, the region and age was characterized by farm life, traditional codes of conduct and the occasional imposition of local chieftains and kings. Such were the prevalent conditions that one day resulted in the capture of Samori Touré's mother in the year 1848, when the forces of a local ruler - Séré-Burlay, of the Cissé clan, mounted an attack on the village and ransacked the habitation, seizing property and captives along with them.

Distraught and heartbroken following the invaluable loss inflicted upon his family in the wake of this indescribable ordeal, the young Samori Touré presented himself to Séré-Burlay in an attempt to secure his mother's freedom by means of a ransom, however resulting from the lack of sufficient funds his objectives were not to be fulfilled and so he offered himself willingly into captivity to secure his mother's freedom.

SEVEN YEARS, SEVEN MONTHS AND SEVEN DAYS

The king's recognition and admiration for Samori's courage, physical agility and his knowledge of the Arabic language earned the young man favor with the ruler who appointed him as his personal bodyguard and later as a commander by virtue of his remarkable dexterity and military insight. Perhaps fate was on his side, for as the years went by he would grow and develop in strength and wisdom, while the military formation and training he acquired in service of the king would prepare him for far greater battles in the future.

However difficult and testing this period of his life may have been, he soon earned his freedom. According to a well-known African tradition, Samori Touré remained in the service of the king for seven years, seven months and seven days before earning his liberty.

THE EMPIRE OF WASSOULOU

What was acquired with blood, sweat and tears was not to be forgotten now that he was once more a free man. Samori's training and experience propelled him into military service under a number of chieftains on whose behalf he had conducted various campaigns of his own, however – what truly distinguished the young general from his peers was his profound insight and overarching desire to unite his people, the Malinké tribe - having assessed their weakness and the inability to defend and protect themselves from foreign assault due to the absence of centralized and consolidated leadership among the tribesmen.

Samori Touré's resolve and determination to bring unity and strength to his people resulted in a successful campaign in which he rallied for support and gained the endorsement of many chiefs and elders within the tribes, these early efforts would be the first steps towards building a powerful empire under one leader.

Though the vision was ambitious and not easily attained, Samori Touré was nevertheless able to recruit a powerful army – one in which he would proceed to instill utmost discipline, uniformity of purpose and advanced instructions in the art of modern day military strategy. The army he commanded would supersede and overwhelm the other tribes in manpower and arsenal. Samori's soldiers were armed with courage and equipped with European guns.

TERRITORIAL EXPANSION

Samori Touré's Mandinka Empire was magnificent and at the height of its development the empire extended to the east as far as Sikasso in Mali, reaching to the Western region near the *Fouta Djallon* empire in modern day Guinea and extending its borders towards Kankan to Bamako in Mali then back to the coastal regions of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Cote d'Ivoire.

The capital city was Bisandugu, in present day Gambia and by 1887 Almami Samori Touré had a powerful military presence in excess of three thousand cavalymen and thirty five thousand soldiers in the infantry units, platoons and companies. Samori's army was modelled on the European military structure. The magnificent empire reached its peak between the years 1883 and 1887, a period in which he took the title of *Almaami*, a title denoting leadership in both religious and civil matters.

Unlike many existing and previous armies in the region, Samori Touré's forces had an unmatched advantage in that they combined traditional and modern strategies on the battlefield.

Samori also reformed the old socio-political hierarchy by consolidating all existing Malinké chiefdoms into a single state under his undisputed authority, while he fulfilled a dual role at the heart of his empire by serving as commander-in-chief and as head of state.

These outstanding and revolutionary measures intensified loyalty to and admiration of the new state he had established but he did not achieve this in total isolation for he did what any exceptional leader would do under similar circumstances by fostering favorable alliances and relationships with the neighboring states such as the *Fula Imamate* of Futa Jallon.

Samori Touré's conquests and military victories resulted in the establishment of a united West African Islamic empire known as the *Mandinka Empire*, also commonly referred to as the *Wassoulou Empire*. By the year 1874 he became so influential and well known for his remarkable leadership and conquests that he was declared a *Faama* – a position very similar to kingship.

COLONIALISM

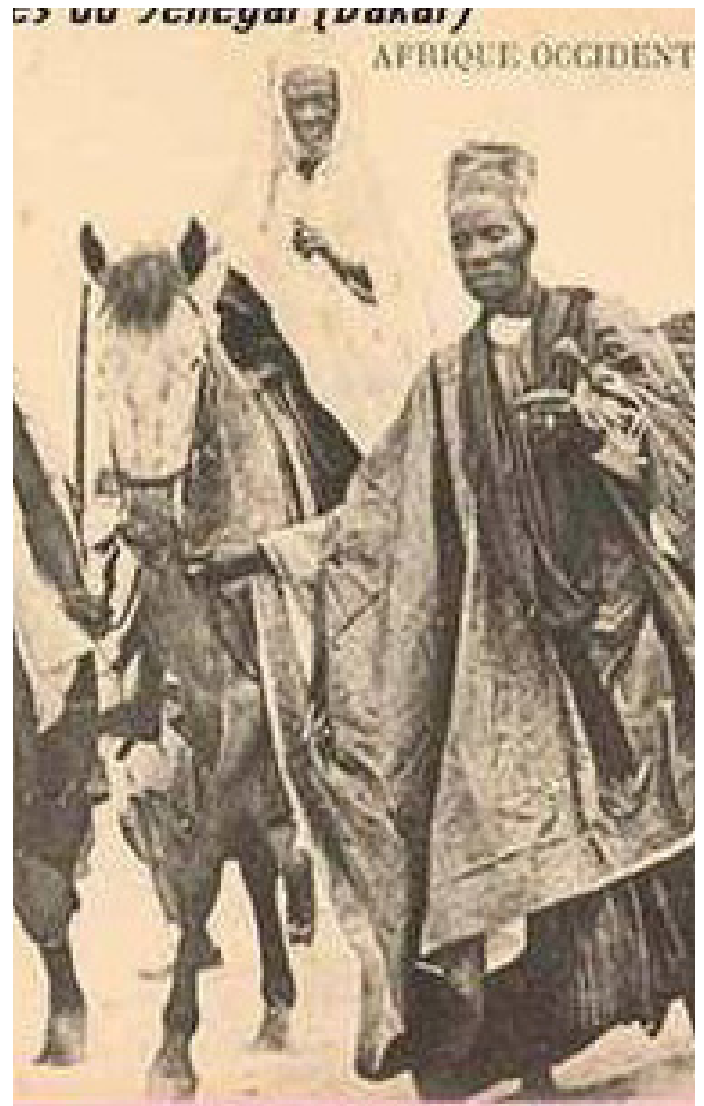
It was during the 1850s as the brutal and degrading industry of human traffic and transatlantic slavery was being abolished and outlawed in Europe - that the Occidental states and nations began to entertain the idea of colonizing and occupying the sovereign and peaceful nations in Africa.

In the year 1882, at the height of its development and strength, the *Mandinka Empire* would come under direct threat of French attack and incursion following a carefully staged ruse according to which the French justified their actions by claiming that Almami Samori Touré and his army had failed to comply with an order to withdraw from the important market center of Kenyeran.

Eventually, in 1884 following the *Berlin Conference* in which Africa was annexed and marked out for European domination, the French forces began to confiscate key outposts and territory from the *Mandinka Empire*.

As the French colonial expansion continued into West Africa, their presence extended eastward as they sought to occupy the terrain between Senegal and Côte d'Ivoire. Not surprisingly, this continued campaign of infiltration fostered deep resentment and provoked retaliation from the existing armies and leadership in the Mandinka territories.

During the course of these long and difficult years, Almami Samori Touré fought valiantly and courageously against the oppressive forces that had imposed themselves on his people without reason or provocation. His struggle resulted in several crushing defeats suffered by the French between the years 1885 and 1889. In fact his opponents came to respect and fear him in due proportion, this was evident in the fact that despite their continual wars, they still referred to him as the *Black Napoleon of the Sudan*.



THE BETRAYAL

However, following several confrontations, Almami Samori Touré was nevertheless willing to negotiate and agree peaceful treaties whenever possible - he subsequently signed a number of contracts with the French from 1882 to 1887. However when these were betrayed in the year 1888 he was obliged to take up arms once more against the treacherous French who had betrayed the agreed terms by encouraging a covert operations to overthrow Samori from within his own camp.



CAPTURE AND EXILE

Regrettably, this unsettling turn of events culminated in the mass exodus of an entire nation in December 1891 when the French colonial administration forced itself into the various regions and settlements leaving the inhabitants little choice but to migrate eastwards, but for a short respite between the years 1893 and 1898 - Almami Samori Touré's army conquered new territories in the Northern regions of the Ivory Coast, there he founded a second empire and established its new capital in the city of Kong - but this did not last long as the French were in hot pursuit of the Imam and his forces. On the 1st of May 1898, the French seized the town of Sikasso situated north of the new empire.

Almami Samori Touré and his army were once more driven out and they stationed themselves in the Liberian forests in preparation for yet more provocation and incursions by the marauding French - and they were not disappointed when not long afterwards they were weakened by the discontinuation of food supplies and the loss of lives that resulted from their difficult and desperate attempt to maintain their defense against the intensifying assaults and attacks of the enemy.

DEATH AND LEGACY

Rather regrettably and most unsuspectedly, the stand-off would soon come to an end when on September the 29th in the year 1898 - two French officers, a sergeant and a scout pounced upon Almami Samori Touré as he performed his prayers outside his tent in the camp at Guélérou, present-day Ivory Coast.

Almami Samori Touré was sitting on his knees engaged in prayer while the enemy slowly lunged onto him from behind. Following this treacherous and cowardly attack by the French, Almami Samori Touré was exiled to Ndjolé in Gabon where he died of pneumonia two years later, on June the 2nd 1900. His tomb is preserved at the *Camayanne Mausoleum*, within the gardens of Conakry Grand Mosque.

ABUL HASAN AL NADWI (1914 - 1999)

THE HONOURED GUEST

A FRUITFUL TREE

Born in India on November 24th in the year 1914. Even before birth, the auspicious infant was destined to inherit a rich and scholastic heritage as the descendant of a noble family.

Abul Hasan's father, Hakim Syed 'Abdul Hayy al-Hasani was widely praised for his monumental eight volume manuscript chronicling the biographies of around five thousand Indian scholars, theologians, jurists and warriors while his sister Sheikha Amatullah Tasneem completed the first Urdu translation of Imam al-Nawawi's classic collection of Hadeeth - *Riyadul-Saliheen*, the translated manuscript was published under the title *Zaad Al-Safr*.

This was the fertile soil from which the tree of knowledge would take root and rise towards the sky in years to come bearing the fruit of scholarship and sagacity in the man who came to be respected and admired by so many people. His name was Abul Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Abdul Hayy al-Hasani al-Nadwi.



BENEATH A MOTHER'S WINGS

While still in his childhood years, Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi was initiated into the vast expanse of Islamic sciences under the auspices of his mother.

It was the encouragement and council of his mother that lit the flame of brilliance in the heart of the prodigious child all the while nurturing his appetite for greater learning and higher aspirations. Abul Hasan al-Nadwi's attachment to his mother was all the more strengthened when in the year 1923, he became an orphan losing his father at the age of nine years old. The young child soon found solace and shelter under the tender wings of his mother – she assumed full responsibility for his education.

For all the enlightened study and lofty aspirations that a scholar may profess to have attained, none can be of more importance than that of the advice given by a righteous mother.

EDUCATION AND FORMATIVE YEARS

The young apprentice began studying the Arabic language under the guidance of Allama Khaleel Ansari al-Yamani, further embellishing his mastery of the language when he met with and studied under the outstanding scholar and seeker of knowledge, Dr Muhammad Taqi-uddin Hilali.

They met in 1930, when the latter arrived at the *Nadwatul 'Ulama* in pursuit of further studies while simultaneously serving at the institute as a professor in the Arabic language. When in the year 1927, Abul Hasan al-Nadwi was admitted into Lucknow University, he became the youngest student on campus, however this was not without merit as his genius soon became evident to the faculty and student body when his lofty command of Arabic grammar, diction and depth of expression subsequently earned him a medal of distinction when he graduated a few years later.

TEACHING AND ACADEMIA

Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi's scholarship was broad and multi-faceted, he nurtured a great interest in poetry, language, history, spirituality and a myriad of noble disciplines.

Language was a prominent part of his study wherein he invested a remarkable number of years acquiring deep and meaningful appreciation of Urdu literature and poetry as well as command of the English language, which he aspired to attain in order to keep himself abreast of contemporary thought and events around the world.

His love of literature and history were awakened in him at a very early age, in fact as a teenager he was a published author when his well-researched and compelling literary tribute to the legendary Indian Muslim revivalist Syed Ahmad Shaheed was featured in Sayyid Rashid Ridha's iconic magazine *Al-Manaar* in the year 1931.

While still unveiling his towering intellect in his writings and academic pursuits, the young scholar began to engage with popular Islamic movements that were gaining ground following the dismantling of the Ottoman Caliphate in Turkey which sent the rest of the Muslim world into a downwards spiral.

Eager to preserve the Muslim way of life, many revivalists founded groups and associations to defend and revive the Ummah, one such group was *Jamaat-e-Islami* in India. Abul Hasan expressed much interest in this group and soon became acquainted with its charismatic leader, Maulana Abul-Alaa Maududi.

Sheikh Abul-Hasan also spent some time with the newly founded Muslim propagation movement *Tablighi Jamaat*, then chaired by its founding father - Maulana Mohammad Ilyas Kandhalwi.



Though he was within close proximity to the inner circles and in correspondence with the leading figures of both aforementioned groups, Sheikh Abul Hasan's unfulfilled potential required a greater horizon in which to unfold – realizing this, thereafter he departed from these associations and embarked upon the very ambitious mission of establishing his own association which he had successfully accomplished in the year 1943. He named his newly founded organisation the '*Anjuman Taleemat-e-Deen*' and proceeded to deliver popular lectures to varied audiences, his address and speech soon gained a sizeable following and many interested parties were attracted to his organisation, most particularly many among the modernist and Government ranks were also captivated and attentive to his message.

STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

It is a well-celebrated fact that Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi met with Sir Mohammed Iqbal, whose unrivalled poetic genius had struck the scholar with its beautiful prose and profound verses, it was following this encounter and further correspondence between the two parties that Sir. Muhammad Iqbal authorized Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi to translate a selection of his poetry into the Arabic language – this was later complimented by a literary tribute in which the Sheikh elucidated on and celebrated the genius of the poet in a book entitled '*The Glory of Iqbal*'.

CIRCLES OF HIGHER LEARNING

Sheikh Abul Hasan's rising prominence and prestige within the circles of higher learning and in the corridors of power enabled him to meet with several noteworthy leaders and thinkers of his time, both at home and abroad.

While maintaining a balanced and respectable stance vis-à-vis the ruling political class in India - who were mostly Hindu and Sikhs, the Sheikh was frequently invoked by leaders and decision makers in his capacity to advocate on behalf of the Muslim minority, he also offered advice and informed opinions in regards to the general Indian population.

Renowned for his astute learning and profound foresight into societal matters, the Sheikh distinguished himself from several clerics who had fallen into the disregarded margins of the typical Mullah who was fast becoming an emblem of rigidity, intolerance and irrationality.

Yet quite contrarily, in the person of Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi the people of India discovered a standard of excellence seldom present in many political circles.

His reputation and credibility as an established intellectual and a deeply cultured man of God opened many doors for him and he took every opportunity to ensure that he could benefit the Muslim minority through these openings.

In fact, India's first ever prime minister - Jawaharlal Nehru, extended invites for the Sheikh to participate in high profile consultative proceedings, this continued through to the late seventies when Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi met with India's first female prime minister - Indira Gandhi. The Sheikh seized this opportune moment to advocate for his community by presenting some well-prepared documents and proposals. In an act of deference and in recognition for his determined efforts to uphold peace and civility between the diverse peoples in India, prime-minister Indira Gandhi paid him a personal visit the following year.

His interactions with the Indian elite was not without purpose or design for he took the opportunity to pass on the message of Islam, hoping to gain favour with the influential classes thereby making it easier for the message to be propagated to a wider audience. It was in the pursuit of this lofty objective that Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi travelled to Bombay in 1935 in an attempt to invite Dr. Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar to embrace Islam.

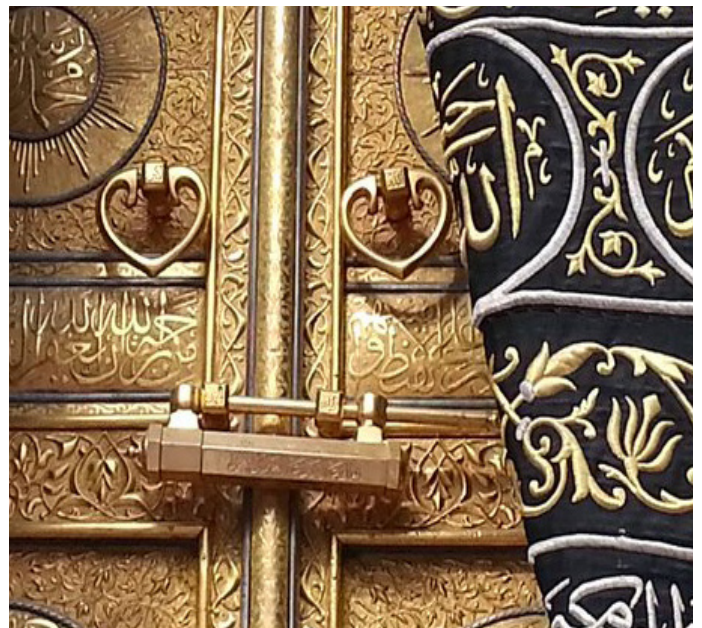
Although his cordial and courteous conduct with the ruling political class of India may have fanned the flickering flames of discontent among some hardliners and non-conformists, his integrity was irreproachable - for his motivations were simply to serve his faith and safeguard his community. This fact became clear for all to see when he declined to accept the highest civil honour awarded to him in 1992 by the Indian Government.

AN HONOURABLE WELCOME

Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi's commitment to the revival of Islam and its rejuvenation across the Arab Muslim world earned him many admirers both within India and across the Middle East. He travelled to Mecca a number of times to perform his pilgrimage and received an honorable welcome by the tribe of *banu-Shaybah* when in the year 1951 they opened the doors to the Kaabah for two days and allowed Sheikh Abul Hassan Al-Nadwi to enter it. Several years later in 1996 when he had returned to Mecca, the Sheikh was once more honored, this time he was given the key to the Kaabah on 8th Sha'ban 1417 Hijri – he opened its blessed doors, entered the sanctuary and proceeded to make supplication inside the ancient house, he was accompanied by Prince Mish'al al-Saud.

During his international tours around the world Sheikh Abul Hasan al-Nadwi met with several high ranking personalities, among them were Hassan al-Banna, King Abdullah of Jordan, he met Muhammad Ali in America and King Saud ibn 'Abdul Aziz of Saudi Arabia as well as the grand Mufti of Saudi Arabia Abdul Aziz bin Abdullah bin Baz.

Among the many cities and countries in which he lectured and visited were the following - London, Paris, Cambridge, Oxford, Spain, Algeria, America, Belgium, Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Malaysia, Sri-Lanka, Libya, Jordan, Yemen, Sudan, Samarkand, Bukhara, Tashkent, Uzbekistan and most markedly his visit to Burma in 1960 - where he delivered an ominous lecture to the Gujarati Muslim community about the dangers of living in luxury without engaging in Da'wah. Though we have enumerated many honors and extraordinary attainments attributed to this noble scholar, it is with regret that we must admit defeat in the face of the tremendous task involved in enumerating and listing all the accolades acquired by this remarkable intellectual.



THE LAST PASSAGE

Abul Hasan 'Ali ibn 'Abdul-Hayy al Hasani al-Nadwi was a man of profound learning and remarkable achievements who was noted for his humility and genteel disposition. He was a revivalist and a reformist, he loved Islam and became a champion for its advocacy throughout the world.

His great literary contribution entitled *Maa-dha Khasiral 'Alam bi ihnitat al Muslimeen* (What has the world lost with the decline of the Muslims) remains with us a lasting legacy of the transformative qualities that still remain imbedded in each and every one of us, it foretells of a probable and not so distant future when we will revive this greatness once more and lead the world to prosperity and peace, InshaAllah.

Sheikh Abul Hasan Ali Hasani-Nadwi passed away on December the 31st in the year 1999. He was 86 years of age when he breathed his last and though died in India, a multitude of mourners prayed Janazah for him in the two most holy sanctuaries of Mecca and Madinah, on the 27th of Ramadan.

HAJI UMAR MITA (1892 - 1976)

THE FIRST SAMURAI

THE FIRST SAMURAI

Who was Haji Umar Mita? and why is this outstanding advocate for Islam largely unknown anywhere outside Japan?

Born on the 19th of December in the year 1892, Ryoichi Mita belonged to the noble Japanese warrior class traditionally referred to as the *Samurai*. His family were Buddhists and at the time of his birth - they resided in the Yamaguchi territory situated in the Western region of Japan.

The young Ryoichi suffered some set-backs in his development and education due to medical difficulties. He had fragile health and a frail physique which made it difficult for him to endure the standard course and duration of higher education, however with patience and perseverance – both qualities that would distinguish him as a scholar in later life, he eventually graduated from Yamaguchi Commercial College in March 1916, aged twenty four years old.

THE CHINESE CONNECTION

Rather unusually – the young Ryoichi had a great interest in Chinese culture – his youthful ambition was to travel to China and learn to speak the language like its native inhabitants, which he achieved soon after graduating from college and then travelling to China.

These enchanted journeys and episodes preceded what was to become Ryoichi's initial steps toward discovering the message of Islam, there in China.

From the limited chance-encounters he had with some Chinese Muslims during his travels, the young man's interest in the principles and lifestyle of Muslims ignited a new and glowing desire to know more about this religion – for as much as the young Japanese explorer had come to know about the Chinese language and its cultural norms, Islam remained yet unknown to him.



JAPANESE INVASION AND CONVERSION TO ISLAM

The young Ryoichi Mita had the opportunity to be acquainted with another Japanese adventurer by the name of Haji Omar Kotaro Yamaoka.

Haji Omar Kotaro was said to have been the very first Japanese Muslim to perform Hajj pilgrimage in Mecca back in the year 1909, he returned to Japan in 1910 and made it his mission to travel throughout Japan with the noble objective of introducing Islam to his people.

Unsurprisingly, these adventurous and exciting articles and books instantly caught the imagination of the young and inquisitive Ryoichi Mita, when he returned to Japan from China in the year 1921, Ryoichi Mita began to study more of Haji Omar Kotaro Yamaoka's writings and also started to frequent lectures – this culminated in a personal encounter with Haji Omar in Kamakura near Tokyo. The opportunity enabled the twenty nine year old Ryoichi Mita to learn more about Islam.

THE MANCHURIAN INCIDENT

The following year - In 1922, Ryoichi Mita got married and moved to China's North-Eastern outpost of Manchuria where he had been assigned to work for a railway company.

When the *Manchurian Incident* occurred leading to the Japanese military invasion of China, it resulted in horrific atrocities devastating many communities. Unpredictably, it was the Japanese invasion of China that bridged the gap between the Japanese people and Muslim communities in China for the first time.

Ryoichi Mita finally took the decisive step to become Muslim and converted in the year 1941, he was forty nine years old when with the help and guidance of Imam Wang Reilan of the Nyuchie Masjid in the Chinese capital city of Beijing, Ryoichi Mita effectively took the testimony of faith. Soon after this life changing moment, he publicized his faith in Islam and changed his name to Umar Mita.



THE ASSOCIATION OF JAPANESE MUSLIMS

During the second Sino-Japanese war in which much of China's territory was confiscated by the invading Japanese forces, many of Japan's early converts to Islam began to relocate themselves out of China and back to Japan. During this time, Umar Mita remained in China until the end of the conflict when he decided that after thirty years of life and service in China, it was time for him to resign from his post at the railway and return home.

Not long after his return, Umar Mita began teaching Chinese in order to make a living, however his new life in Japan was soon disrupted followed the tragic death of his wife – resulting in yet another resignation from work and a subsequent relocation.

In 1952, he settled in Tokyo – having decided to focus his efforts exclusively towards the study of Islam and the understanding of the Arabic language. By this stage, the sixty year old student of knowledge was to embark on a journey of learning and cultivation, beginning from the very foundations.

It is a well-known fact that during the 1950s when Umar Mita first arrived in Tokyo, life in the city was extremely difficult due to the distress and disturbance caused by the recent war. Food and clothing were becoming scarce and the infrastructure was severely damaged.

Yet notwithstanding these adverse conditions, the nascent community of Muslims was just getting on its feet, thereby establishing the first Japanese Muslim organization in 1953, which came to be known as the *Association of Japanese Muslims*.

MUSLIM MIGRANTS

Although the indigenous Muslim community was instrumental in laying the foundation for what is today a growing population of Japanese Muslims, it must not be forgotten that Japan had earlier granted asylum to a few hundred Turks, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyzs and Kazakh Muslim refugees from Central Asia and Russia in the wake of the *Bolshevik Revolution* during the course of World War I.

With the arrival of these Muslim refugees a few Mosques were established and some Japanese people embraced Islam. In fact, Japan's first mosque is the *Kobe Muslim Mosque*, built in the Kitano-cho foreign district in the year 1935.

Remarkably, the building survived a wave of air raids that laid waste to most of Kobe's urban districts back in 1945 and also remained intact despite the *Great Hanshin earthquake* of 1995 that inflicted extensive damage to the modern buildings surrounding the mosque.

TRANSLATION OF QURAN

In pursuing his Islamic studies, Umar Mita began to travel once more, this time he headed towards Pakistan in 1957 from where he accompanied the *Tablighi Jamaat* in order to participate in several trips throughout the world. The following year, in 1958 he headed for Mecca to perform the sacred pilgrimage, The Hajj.

He concluded his international travel and the pilgrimage to Mecca by returning back to Japan with renewed efforts to promote Islam in his homeland. It was at this juncture that Haji Umar Mita was elected to the presidential post at the *Japanese Muslim Association* following the death of the previous incumbent.

Though his work and studies had started very late in life, he was sixty nine years old when the opportunity present itself to him. The challenges and obstacles before him did not discourage or intimidate him as he pursued his objective and ambition to share Islam with the Japanese society with whatever means he had at his disposal.

Consequently, it was during Haji Umar Mita's demanding leadership role as the president of the *Japanese Muslim Association* that he embarked on his most ambitious project yet, he decided to translate the meaning of the Glorious Quran into the Japanese language, thereby opening a new window of opportunity through which countless Japanese people would come into direct contact with the message of Islam. The challenge was very demanding and prior to this resolution, there had already been four Japanese translations of the Holy Qur'an, which were all authored by non-Muslims and published in 1920, 1937, 1950 and 1957 respectively.

However, as a committed and veritable Muslim, Haji Umar Mita felt the need to publish a new Japanese translation of the Holy Quran, this would be distinguished from the previous published editions not only because the translator was Muslim but also because it was to be the first of such translations that would be translated directly from the Arabic text unlike the previous four attempts which were all rendered into Japanese from the second-hand French, English and German translations – furthermore, Haji Umar Mita's translation would be reviewed and revised carefully by established Muslim scholars in the Arab world, in actuality – this was the first real Japanese translation.

In the midst of his new project, the 70 year old Haji Umar embarked on yet another journey to Pakistan in the year 1961 – he spent some time in Lahore where he continued to work on his Japanese translation while pursuing further studies in the Arabic language and Quranic exegesis with local scholars.

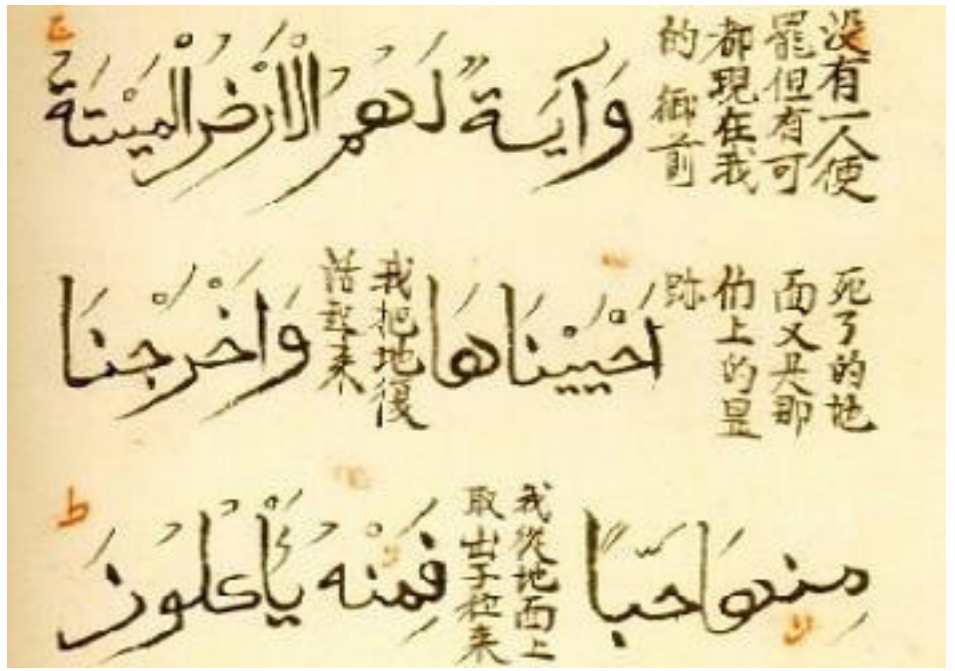
He subsequently received another invitation to travel, this time he visited Mecca where he was granted the support and encouragement of the *Muslim world League* in his ongoing mission to translate the meaning of the Holy Quran into the Japanese language.

There again, Haji Umar Mita took the opportunity to learn more about the Quran and the Arabic language directly from scholars residing in Mecca, Medina, Jeddah, Taif and Riyadh – resulting in a beautiful and intimate translation of the meaning taken directly from the Arabic Quran.

FIRST JAPANESE MANUSCRIPT

In the year 1968, following several years of dedicated study and unwavering commitment to the Japanese translation of the meaning of the Glorious Quran, Haji Umar Mita eventually completed the first draft in copy which he then submitted to the *Japan Muslim Association* for review before presenting the revised manuscript two years later in June 1970 to the *Muslim World League* in Makkah. Following a thorough and meticulous evaluation conducted by a committee of specialist scholars over the duration of six months, the manuscript was finally approved and a publishing agreement was signed with the Takumi Kobo Printing Company of Hiroshima.

Twelve years after Haji Umar Mita began the monumental task of translating the meaning of the Glorious Quran into the Japanese language, he attained his goal and objective on the 10th of June in the year 1972. The first printed edition was published and copies were made widely available resulting from the backing and support of King Faisal bin 'Abdul 'Aziz Al-Sa'ud.



THE FIRST SAMURAI

Haji Umar Mita left a beautiful legacy behind him and an outstanding life example for so many people to take benefit from. He passed away in the year 1976, aged eighty four years old.

Though it may be contested whether or not Haji Umar Mita is the most remarkable Japanese Muslim in known historical records, we can nevertheless be assured that he can rightly be called the first Samurai Muslim and the pride of Muslim Japan.

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